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The Stray Thoughts

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By
Sadaya Charan Das.

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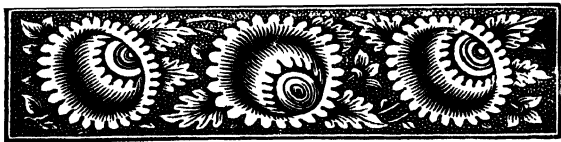
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To

My dear brother
Babu Sarvananda Das

whose deep devotion to One True God roused
the spirit of Theism in my juvenile mind
and whose subsequent generous and
indulgent view of my thought
and action kept me up
This little work
is in token of
gratitude most affectionately dedicated.



PREFACE.



This is a collection of some selected discourses originally read on different occasions during 1896—1900. I had not the remotest idea of printing them in a book form as I never considered them worth the distinction. Some of my friends however thought otherwise, and insisted on their publication. In deference to their kind wishes, as also with a view to leave behind an opportunity for my children, relations and friends, who are not near me, of knowing my views on the faith I have cherished and religion I have followed, I have decided

to attempt the undertaking and sincerely trust that my shortcomings will be overlooked while the truths humbly aimed at will be allowed to do their work in all inquisitive minds.

In writing my essays I received assistance chiefly from Mr. P. C. Mazumdar's "Spirit of God," Mr. Blackie's "Self-Culture" and some of the essays of Channings and Emerson, to all of whom my acknowledgments are due. I am also indebted to my brother Ramani Mohon Das and to Babu Navin Chandra Gupta who very kindly went through the proof-sheets.

SHILLONG, } S. C. DAS.
9th August 1902. }

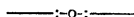


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Stray Thoughts.



Raja Ram Mohon Roy Anniversary.

QUINTON HALL.

THE 27TH SEPTEMBER 1896.



WE have gathered here to-day, gentlemen, to commemorate the death of that great Indian reformer, who was unquestionably the mightiest production of the combined influence of English and Mahomedan rule in India, whose profound erudition, unerring wisdom, and true insight into the essence of things have not only been freely acknowledged by his contemporaries both in England

and America, but are even now confessed to have been peculiarly his own, to have remained without an equal. Unquestionably, Ram Mohon Roy was a wonderful man, a combination of all that is honourable in life, noble in conduct, true in religion, pure in morals, sound in politics and healthy in social reform. To pay homage to such a man is our sacred duty, to review his life occasionally is a profitable employment, to ponder over his noble deeds is a necessity for our own edification. Indeed, I can conceive of nothing more honourable, more patriotic, more edifying, more sublime than to sit round the tomb of such a great man once a year, and revive our feeble, dormant spirit by the ever-glowing brilliancy of his departed soul. More than sixty years ago, Ram Mohon Roy was separated from us by the unavoidable hand of death, but his spirit still lives with us. It lived and worked with our predecessors in times gone by, it is living and working with us to-day and it will continue to live and work with our progeny in the future. Separate from it the inspiring spirit of the famous Raja, and this meeting of to-day will at once dwindle into a dead, meaningless nothing. Remove from them the instructive power, and the voluminous works of the devoted author will appear no better than a heap of

so many reams of waste paper. It is truly said that a great man never dies, but survives all the dead. Let us realize this, let us elevate ourselves to such a level as will enable us to conduct the proceedings of the day with that amount of love and veneration which the occasion demands.

There is no gain-saying that Ram Mohn Roy was a great man : but what constituted his greatness, what moulded his character, what made him what he was? Surely it was the high standard of his religion. It was his deep religious conviction which formed the nutriment of his soul, the crowning glory of his life. Religion shaped and guided his conduct as it did in the case of all reformers, whether social, political or religious. About political reformers opinion may differ, but we hardly know of a greater political adviser than Krishna of the Mahábhárata, and yet he was the father of the immortal Gíta, the invaluable guide to peace and happiness. Divorce from Mr. Gladstone his religious instincts, and he will at once appear quite powerless to serve the East and the West alike. It is religion that has the power of keeping the equilibrium. Verily, it is only religion which can unite man with God and bind man to man. It is this religion that taught Ram Mohon Roy the

sacred dictum that to serve God comprised serving his creatures. It is this religion that acted like the main spring, the central power that gave strength to his energies, and set them to work in the different phases of his life. Let us, therefore, see what his religion was, and how he acquired and developed it.

In the very early period of his life, when he was yet a student of the Persian and the Urdu literature, the monotheism of Islam made a deep impression on his mind. This impression took stronger and stronger hold on him as he grew in the knowledge of the pristine purity of the Vedic teachings. Endowed as he was with an extraordinary amount of intelligence, capacity and power of comprehension, he soon became a complete and thorough master of the different schools of Hindu philosophy and discovered the priceless gems which were lying hidden unsought and uncared for amid the decayed ruins of Indian greatness. These he treasured up, these he studied carefully, these he incorporated into that system of progressive religion of which he was to be the immortal founder. Ram Mohon Roy did not stop here, but he continued his researches, studied the different systems of religion then prevailing in the four quarters.

of the globe, and collated the truths that were found in them. Truly speaking, Ram Mohon Roy was the man who, as Professor Max Müller has lately admitted, was the first student and propounder of comparative religion—the synthetical compound of the generalized truth. It is this religion that gave his earnest and inquisitive soul rest and peace: it is in this religion that he found a solution of all combative problems of the time: it is in this religion that the high ideals of Buddhism found a practical field: it is in this religion that the essence of the vast and extensive Hinduism was epitomized: it is here where the monotheism of the Bible and the Koran was re-affirmed: it is here where a harmony was established between science and true philosophy: it is here where all creeds and sects found a common place of worship. Verily, it is this precious religion which broadened the heart of Raja Ram Mohon Roy and inspired it with that liberality and catholicism for which he was so renowned, and which generally made him what he was.





Sin and the Way out.

MAGHOTSOB.

THE 17TH JANUARY 1897.

I NEED hardly tell you, Gentlemen, that I have great diffidence in dealing with the subject of this afternoon ; but it is a subject which concerns every one of us in our daily life ; nay more, sin and its effects follow us beyond the grave. However callous we may be to the directions of the scriptures of different lands, however anxious we may be to ignore customary bindings, to evade all kinds of doctrinal obligations, there is an inspiration of right conduct in man, and a power of insight into what is good and what is bad in his character. It is unquestionably true that he naturally embraces what is holy and pure, and intuitively recoils from what is impure and unholy. But fortunately, or unfortunately, I know not, this internal law, this inward monitor, is never given in perfection, and it is consequently seldom.

kept pure in any one of us. Our surroundings greatly affect it; our indolence, our unrestricted habits, our undisciplined propensities exercise a controlling influence over it; and within our sad experience, the whole course of things seems to point in the opposite direction. Hence the lives of the greater of human beings are not free from imperfection, waywardness, nay, even wickedness and vice. As for ourselves, who are no better than creatures of circumstances, our exposure to sin and contamination is unquestionably much greater; and there should be nothing astonishing if at every step of our life we discover some new corruption of the heart, some new force of sinful passion beating us back. To think and ponder over the malignity of sin, to watch and observe its work in the career of our life is, therefore, of the utmost importance to every one of us. Yea, it is a duty which we cannot shirk. Hence my attempt to touch upon this extremely important, and at the same time, the most difficult and delicate subject that has a direct bearing on human life.

But to begin with. What is sin? We know what a divergence of belief as regards sin and its origin prevails among different nations and different sections of religious bodies. Some ascribe it to the fall of Adam, and believe sin to be the guilt and

corruption of our nature : a property which is born with us and which we inherit from our forefathers : and hence, we hear of a spotless child, aye, a child yet in the womb of its mother, as being sinful, albeit it is still incapable of thought or action. There are others who attribute it to human impatience ; while a third set of theologians believe laziness to be the cause of sin. Sin, they say, is a negation, not doing right. Justin Martyr, a distinguished Roman Catholic Father, ascribes the origin of sin to sensuality, a doctrine which is not much at variance with what is propounded in the following verses of the Gita :—

ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।

सङ्गात् संजायते कामः कामात् क्रीडोऽभिजायते ॥

क्रीडाङ्गवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् अतिविभ्रमः ।

अतिभ्रंशश्च द्विनाशो बुद्धिनाशश्च प्रपश्यति ॥

i.e., Man musing on the objects of sense, conceiveth an attachment to them ; from attachment ariseth desire ; from desire, anger cometh forth ; from anger proceedeth delusion ; from delusion, confused memory ; from confused memory, the destruction of discrimination ; from destruction of discrimination he perisheth—(Annie Besant). Again our ancient Rishis

assign the origin of sin to *avidya*, which is said to be eternal and inexplicable.

But, notwithstanding this diversity of opinion as regards the origin of sin, there prevails a concordance among the philosophers of every clime and region that sin does exist in us ; that flesh and blood as well as the rest of the surrounding things clog at every step of our progress, and stand in the way of our realization of the purpose of God ; that we have to struggle incessantly against these inhospitable environments, if we are to fulfil the eternal purpose, the spiritual destiny for which we are made. All this, our own moral nature which is no unfaithful guide, fully confirms. But the question still remains, what is sin ? Channing says —“ Sin is the violation of duty ” ; if so, it cannot exist before conscience has begun to act, before power to obey it is unfolded or developed. Indeed sin cannot be a radical disease with which we are born, but it is a temporary malady to which all are liable. It is not that our nature is radically evil, but that it is radically good, and may be regarded even as divine because it is created by God, and creation means “ God’s self-embodiment in outward nature.” The spirit of God is the law of life for man. A breach of this law is sin, or in other

words, sin may be defined as voluntary and conscious transgression of God's law, originating with the individual himself, and at the moment of committing it by means of free-will. Sin is not, I repeat, an inborn tendency in man's nature, not something permanent in him, not something to which he is destined to succumb, not something involuntary of which he is not conscious. It is on the contrary, choosing and acting in opposition to his sense of right, in opposition to some known obligation. That by constant practice of sin we may acquire a vicious habit, I freely admit; that by harbouring impure desire we may develop some sinful tendency of mind, I do not deny; that frequent commission of crime hardens the heart, no one will gain-say; that every thought and act of wickedness destroy our moral equipoise and balance it towards the evil, I will not question; but I do not hesitate to totally repudiate the theory that this vicious habit, this sinful tendency of mind, this over-balance towards evil, holds or can hold a permanent seat in our moral nature, can immutably affect our free-will, our higher desires and purer affections. For, however depraved, however diseased, however degraded a man may be, there is still some good in him, some holy

aspiration in his unholy mind, some throbs of generosity in his hardened heart, some warnings of conscience in his soul lurking and pointing to the direction of his ultimate course—the course of the spiritual man in whom the infinite principle, the sense of eternal truth and right, is supreme.

I do not mean by all this to lessen the gravity of sin ; on the contrary, it is my object to guard against thinking lightly of it. There is no giant so monstrous, no enemy so powerful, in doing practical injury as sin. Pain or poverty, misery or misfortune, despair or despondence, are nothing in comparison with the stings of conscience, the pangs of remorse, or the agonies of sin. It is truly said that fools only mock at sin.

That God has been bountiful in giving us all that is good and honourable admits of no doubt whatever ; that naturally we are made to love holiness and piety there is no difficulty in admitting ; that life is not a curse but a blessing is evident from what we see and feel, but we must own that we encounter evils which brutalize and degrade us ; that all our efforts in the pursuit of holiness are continually baffled ; that sin often lies hidden and can run us into destruction at any moment. To many, this may seem an extreme view, but I can

assure them that it is not so. It will bear the strictest test. Let the test be applied to ourselves. Living as we do in a civilized community, we do not indeed commit great crimes or fall into flagrant vices. They have little temptation to attract us. We have some aims, some object—love, friendship, the good opinion of our fellow-beings—which would make it impossible for us to be glaringly vicious. There is no doubt that a certain sensitiveness of conscience—the ever-waking inner man—the influence of good education and good habits restrain us from evil and preserve in us a certain amount of uprightness and purity of character. But are we in reality as good men as we seem to be? Can we stand the examination, the scrutiny of our own selves—the test of the touchstone which God has implanted in us? I say, no; I say so boldly and confidently. Let us look a little deeper and see how we run into many small violations of the same laws which we would not break on a larger scale. We do not steal, yet we commit every day some slight acts which are not perfectly honest; we take advantage of others in little things amounting to depriving them of their legitimate rights. We do not lie, yet we exaggerate and conceal part of the truth and colour our statement so as to

produce the desired effect. We do not kill, but we are inclined, nay willing, to injure him who interferes with our interests. We do not commit murder, but we do not hesitate to pierce the softest heart with the sharp edge of the tongue. Miss Bremer truly says, "There are words which sever hearts more than sharp swords do. There are words the points of which sting the heart through the course of a whole life." With these tendencies and feelings, who knows what we might not do under different influences? Indeed there is, as it were, a deep and hidden valley of evil within our heart. Oh! how much evil is there under the smooth surface of a refined face, how many thoughts of sin pass to and fro in the heart while the countenance seems pure and calm! How many of them would have found an outlet had they not been restrained by external influences, by checks and barriers by which we are surrounded! Every now and then there occurs, in the midst of the most refined societies, some startling revelation of long concealed wickedness which makes us look each other in the face and draw a long breath as if to say, "Is it true?" But there is nothing strange, nothing astonishing, about the occurrence. It is only the natural outflow of the secret sin and pollution

which were lying hidden in the inner man. Surely, in the face of our heart's history, we should not think lightly of sin.

Sin is a positive evil, it is death ; for it deadens our love for God and goodness. We know that we ought to love God and obey Him, but sin alienates our heart from Him. We are not always conscious of His presence though we know He is near us. We cannot always pray to Him sincerely, though we know God only accepts our sincere prayers. We know God is our Father and best Friend and is ever close by, yet we can seldom rely on Him entirely. All this, because the sense of guilt leads us away from Him. Every act of sin creates an evil tendency, tempts to graver sin and brings in greater moral degradation. In proportion as a man sinks into moral depravity he is further from God ; and the further a man is from God the nearer is he to death, for God is the source of life. Surely, in the face of our life's history we cannot think lightly of sin.

The effect of sin does not die with our mortal frame ; but, on the other hand, the miseries of disobedience to conscience and God continue ; nay, they become greater when the soul is relieved of the environment of flesh and blood, of the

influencing power of passions and pursuits. We know that all religious bodies do not hold the same view. Some maintain that after death the soul remains in a state of sleep or unconsciousness until it is recalled, re-arraigned and judged on the Day of Judgment, when it is either accepted or rejected for ever. Others hold that the soul on leaving this abode of flesh, immediately passes into another of a lower or higher order as it is vicious or virtuous in this life ; that with death we are at once transformed into a different being, and all our sinful tendencies which we might have acquired here at once cease to operate upon us. There are others, again, who think that punishment for sin is confined to the present state only ; that moral evils, however great, are buried with the body. I will not tax your patience by a lengthy discussion on the merits and demerits of these doctrines, but judging generally in the light of reason and conscience, I leave them to you to decide whether they do not appear to be most irrational and contradictory to the divine nature pervading the whole universe. Is it compatible with reason to believe that a just and infinitely loving God will, on account of its failings, condemn for ever a soul which He Himself has created with an imperfect nature ?

The doctrine that death changes our nature or status is equally untenable and contrary to all reasonable expectations. For what is death? It is merely the dissolution of certain limbs and organs by which the soul now acts. But they often perish during life time, and does character change therewith? No. On the other hand, the loss of the limb, the want of the organ rather increases our longing for its use, and intensifies our grief caused by the unsatisfied desire. Death, similarly, only enhances our pain and pang by re-calling into memory all our way-wardness and selfishness, representing in their true colours our evil passions and perversities, vices and corruptions. Here we live in a world which is full of enjoyable things and objects, in the midst of which we may forget ourselves; here we are surrounded by pleasures and gaities which may delude us and intoxicate us with false hopes; here we may even find for a time a deceitful joy in an evil course, but the case will be quite different when death puts a veil over these pleasant and delightful scenes, when it shuts our ears against all sweet and melodious voices, deprives us of all the luxuries of this world and separates us from cheerful associations. Yet it cannot set us free from habits and character which we form here. We

must carry them with us wherever we go. Nothing else follows us. Wealth and honour, land and laws, food and drink, which often spare us no time for repentance here, must stop at the gate of the grave ; and, however much we may wish to forget the unhappy thought of past moral transgressions and their effects, however anxious we may be to sink into oblivion the memory of a wasted or ill-spent life, they will still appear, in all the vividness of their reality, and bring in their train the intensified ache and agony of an unsatisfied lust. Such is the disastrous effect of sin, and naturally the question arises, how can we get rid of it ? What is the way out of it ?

Sin is an internal disease, and though it is a temporary malady, it does not eradicate itself. It must be removed by the inner moral forces ; no external appliances will prove efficacious. The remedy must be internal as the disease affects the inner man. Again, sin is a violation of the law of God — a breach of His command, a difference between the Ruler and the ruled. The law-breaker must therefore go to the law-maker and receive his deserts. The dealing is direct. No one else can judge him, no one else can stand or suffer for him. The remedy suggested for the emancipation of the penitent is very simple and consists only in four

words, viz., “ देव प्रसादात् आत्मप्रभावात् ”—Divine grace and self-exertion. It is short, but it harmonises entirely with our premises. It appears like a homeopathic globule, but its remedial power is very great, being the result of lifelong devotion. You will observe that both divine grace and self-exertion are necessary for the recovery of the sinner. Self-exertion alone will not do. There is no denying that human will, human effort, has a certain part to play in the matter of sanctification, and it must be played with all earnestness, but it is not enough to bring about the intended result. How often do we resolve, yea, make the effort too, to rectify the evil tendency, and how often do we fail? How often do we meet with unexpected resistance, how often do we feel as if the spirit was willing but the flesh was not? St. Paul divides man into spirit, soul and body. The carnal man is one in whom the earthly appetites are supreme. The natural man is one in whom the soul, the finite will, is supreme. The spiritual man is he in whom the infinite will, the sense of eternal truth and right, is supreme. When a man blindly and foolishly follows his lower instincts, he moves in the brute kingdom. When he is rationally and freely choosing only the right and doing it, he is probably living the ideal life, not the divine life of

which we have but a faint conception. But when the man is half way between the two states, when his conscience is pulling one way and his desires drawing the other, when he is choosing right and doing wrong, when he is living both a spiritual and a carnal life, then he feels the necessity for help from above, and this is exactly our position. Here we feel our weakness. There are truth, courage and purity in us, but they all need divine reinforcement. Here we feel the need of a higher being from whom to draw our moral strength. Our God is a bountiful God. Every need that we feel He alone removes. The needy soul seeks and it is given, prays and its prayer is at once heeded. This is the union of the divine spirit and human spirit, of the divine grace and human exertion. Thus united, our reason sees through the divine intelligence, our convictions glow like sunlight, our love yearns after every creature, our sense of holiness becomes an atmosphere in which the spirit floats like an angel. We become the highest and best according to our possibilities. This is the way out of sin. Brethren, in it lies our hope and our aspiration.

May the views this day given lead us to self-communion and new energy, watchfulness and prayer against our sins.



Religion—its aim and Essentials.

MAGHOTSOB.

THE 22ND JANUARY 1898.

I THANK God that I have again been allowed an opportunity of appearing before you, gentlemen, after the lapse of full one year. It is of no moment if my voice is feeble, my language faulty, or my thoughts desultory. The pleasure of meeting so many friends together, the delight of discussing a topic which is so important and so essential to our daily life, and, above all, the natural joy of our soul in the thought and contemplation of matters spiritual are in themselves agreeable engagements which should be eagerly sought for, specially after the mighty changes which have taken place since the last anniversary of our Somaj. In the physical world, the sight of these revolutions is visible everywhere in these Hills. On the very spot where we are now seated, new things are taking the place of the old. The very stone structure which gave us shelter and

protection last year is no longer in existence. You are welcome to-day in an incomplete *ekra* building which cannot yet boast of its doors and windows, nor can it offer you a comfortable shelter or full protection against the inclemency of the weather. But this state, either, is not to last long, and we expect very soon to have a spacious Hall encompassed by a splendid verandah and fronted by a magnificent portico. So in the fulness of time the signs of destruction, the symbols of transfiguration, the scars of mutilation, will die out, and our eyes will no longer see scenes which are distasteful to look at and our ears will no longer hear cries of woe, which are so painful to human feelings.

Similarly, in the spiritual world mighty changes have been wrought, changes indicating an entire demolition of things untrue and unreal, and a consolidation of things true and real. The occurrence of the 12th June indeed is an unusual experience in human life. It has sapped many a rocky plinth of unbelief, roused to action many a dormant, lethargic spirit, and has set to work many a thoughtless, callous soul. Softer and nobler sentiments have taken the place of hard and selfish passions, and a great many misdirected energies have been regulated and refitted to their proper position. The

futility of mortal strength, the inefficiency of human wisdom, the utter incompetency of human skill and power, have been demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt. A man was not then breathing who did not feel the nothingness of his power and skill, the feebleness of his strength and ability. A heart was not then throbbing that did not seek the protection of a mightier hand, that did not need the guidance of a wiser intellect. A head was not then erect that did not bow down with reverential awe and obedience before the source of all forces, the cause of all causations. But as in the external so in the internal world, nothing remains at a stand-still. As day followeth night so destruction followeth reconstruction, and re-erection, demolition. Gloom is seen to peep behind the light and iniquity to overlook virtue. Thus what is gained by accidents is lost as it were by revolving circumstances. Hence the necessity of our thinking over a past thought, discoursing on a well-worn subject, telling a thrice-told tale. As we must eat and drink daily to make up the inevitable loss of flesh and blood, so must we think and ponder, hear and be heard, on subjects having the property to invigorate the sleepy spirit, to recoup the mental deterioration.

Man is indeed the most wonderful of all creations. He has the dual nature of the outer universe and the inner spirit, the weakness of the corporeal and the strength of the spiritual. In him the laws and methods of unity and eternity work simultaneously. In him the elements of death and the spirit of life are marvellously harmonised. In him the spiritual hunger and thirst are as much facts as the hunger and thirst of his material body. Spiritual life, living in God, is as much a reality to him as the physical life. If we survey the amplitudes of nature we shall find that man, unlike the rest of the creation, has a double purpose to accomplish. He has to govern and be governed ; to rule and be ruled. He is not to pursue his course by blind force, not to yield thoughtlessly to physical demands or brute propensities, but to exercise free-will, independent judgment to supply the one or to check the other. This freedom of action, however, is said to be the root of all evil. The misery and corruption that blacken our daily life, the grief and sorrow that mar our domestic happiness, the trouble and anxiety that so often render life not worth living, are all attributed to it. But if freedom of action involves the existence of evil, there is no doubt that it also contains the germs of all the pleasures and

happiness which human nature is capable of enjoying. This divine gift is therefore our most valuable treasure : and whether the life we live is good or evil, useful or useless, happy or miserable, depends very much upon the right or wrong use of it. The All-knowing Wise Father has made ample provision against its wrong application. He has not only endowed us with an insatiable desire to know the truth and be wise, but has also revealed Himself in the material and moral world, and has made His glorious abode in ourselves. Nor is this all. Amid the chances, changes and delusions of life, He casts his unfailing radiance, and aids like a loving father our humble exertions to achieve the end. The visible things of the world, the invisible things of the mind, the thoughts and deeds of the mighty intellects of by-gone ages, unveil God and His wisdom to his devout sons. So we are never without Him. The poet rightly said :—

“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will.”

We are merely to see and hear, feel and perceive, receive and follow the guidance of our universal monitor. A loyal and faithful submission to this divine training, a careful and attentive attainment of

this sublime culture, is religion. There is nothing strange, extraordinary or unnatural in it. It is inseparably imbedded in the nature of man. Religion is deeper than mere opinion, stronger than prejudice, more immutable than doctrinal belief or systematised theology. These are human institutions, and are necessarily faulty and defective. They are more apt to create divisions than to train us up for the arduous duties of life. Religion far from being built upon doctrines and dogmas, is too often weighed down and crushed by them. Religion is one as God is one. It is an irresistible and irrepressible instinct of human nature which necessarily finds its embodiment in formal beliefs and principles, in ceremonial rites and observances, in holy books and scriptures which, however outwardly divergent and seemingly conflicting, agree mainly in their intrinsic essence. The seeking and seeing of God is instinctive in every man's heart, inspite of so many systems and so many tenets. Religion does not involve sects. Sects are the work of sectarians. Religion is intended to bring peace on earth and good will towards men, and whatever tends to foster hatred and persecution, however correct in letter, must be utterly wrong in spirit. The antagonism really lies in the form and

language in which man may be seeking to express the result of his spiritual experience, not with religion itself. Religion is independent of forms, and should not be confounded with them. Dogmas are outward coverings. True religion can always reclothe itself in harmony at once with its own spirit and with the spirit of each succeeding age.

Intellectual acquirement is not religion. It aids us in believing that which is right, in distinguishing that which is wrong, while religion trains us in following, in acting up to that belief. It is necessary for the development of our faculties, as food and drink are indispensable for the growth of this mortal frame. So the more free this mental food is from the pernicious influences of restraint and repression, from the dwarfish disposition of narrowness of thought and exclusiveness of feeling, from the corrosive domination of the rebellious spirit of unruly passion and the iniquitous poison of vice, the more wholesome will it be to us. Indeed, education is a tonic — not life, a mirror — not sight. A lifeless mass of complex theology, inherited by tradition, enforced by external authority and unrealized by spiritual experience, can help us in no way. Hence the fear, which is perhaps not altogether groundless, that by the light of Western education, by the

expansion of science and theology, great changes are being wrought in our system of thought, and that we are losing the true spirit of religion.

Religion does not breathe terror or dread. It is a strength, a guide, a comfort, not a source of intellectual anxiety ; not a nursery for the growth of ghastly fears which keep us restless and render us helpless ; not a cradle to engender wrathful apprehensions which can only emanate from a jealous, revengeful enemy. There is, however, a prevailing belief among certain sections of religious people that God is subject to anger and irritation, animosity and indignation, and that feasts and offerings, sacrifice and penance can pacify Him. Many go so far as to attribute sickness and other misfortunes to His displeasure, and instead of taking steps to obviate them by rational means, they propitiate and worship Him to win His favour. Nothing can be more irrational, nothing more erroneous than a theory of this kind. It may satisfy childish belief, convince undeveloped intelligence ; it may keep in restraint the passions from commission of deeds of a rash and benious nature, but can offer no help in revealing to us the most interesting Being in the universe whose character is inexhaustible in its essential perfections and endless

manifestations, and whose nearness to us and constant influence upon us arrest the mind from the thought and commission of deeds opposed to His nature. Indeed, the first duty of religion is to form the highest conception of God, which alone can train us to bear with hope and patience all the diseases of the body, the anguish of the heart and the corroding cares of the mind, and to accept them as dispensations of that great Master who regulates everything for our good.

Men have, again, in all ages, thought that they must sacrifice to religion some elements of their nature. To cherish this religious sentiments some have warred against their social affections and led solitary lives ; some against their senses, and have abjured all pleasures of life ; some against reason, and have superstitiously feared to reflect on thoughts and foolishly dreaded to read the books which savour of principles antagonistic to their own ; some against work, and have coward-like shrunk from public life : all apprehending that if they were to give free scope to their natural emotions, their religious life would be chilled and numbed. This notion of hostility between religion and human nature has in some form or other taken root in

most systems of faith. There is, no doubt, some satisfaction in the denial of those pleasures of life which seem to attract us; some gratification in renouncing what the world most greedily hankers after; some glory in parting with one or other member of this carnal abode; some secret joy in suffering countless privations in the name of religion; but it is very doubtful whether such sacrifice, such self-torture, can be styled true religion, can be said to be the fulfilment of the divine law and will. We are not our own creators, nor have we any power to substitute one of our organs for another. The problem of life must be solved with what is given. To kill, to destroy, to annihilate, is beyond our province. By attempting to do so, we simply break the harmony, cripple the organ, upset the machinery. Expansion and not contraction, regulation and not demolition, development and not strangulation, is our destiny. Anything running counter to its natural course is exotic. Disaffection, disobedience, disloyalty to divine order, is not, and cannot be religion. The saint is therefore he who drills his desires, controls his passions, regulates his will and keeps them in subjection to the higher powers of his nature.

Truly hath the author of the *Gita* said :—

रागद्वेषवियुक्तैस्तु विषयानिन्द्रियैश्चरन् ।

आत्मवश्यैर्विधेयात्मा प्रसादमधिगच्छति ॥ ६४ ॥

(२४ अध्यायः)

i. e., the disciplined self, moving among sense-objects with senses free from attraction and repulsion, mastered by the self, goes to Peace.

Man sees and approves the good and resolves on amendment and progress. He has a conception of excellence which he longs to make real in character and deed, but the weight of the changing nature of all that surrounds him dwindles the spirit to the dust; resistless currents of contending forces are flowing through his material and immaterial nature: there is a tendency to excess in every passion and impulse; there is an incessant cry of insatiety in every wish and desire. Undisciplined man stands aghast amidst these opposing influences, and feels that sensuality and sloth are perpetually thwarting his upward efforts. So tremendous is the power of passion, so subtle is temptation, so contagious is the evil of example, that a man conscious of no improvement but such as he may attain by his ungoverned will, might well despair of resisting the combined forces of evil. The great function of religion is to call forth and rear up, to

elevate and purify the spirit of man in such circumstances and to train and develop his latent capacities after the divine order. The work of religion is to consecrate what science has discovered, what the intellect has justified, and what the practical wisdom of life has utilized, bringing all knowledge and power within the domain of conscience, and crystallizing conduct into character. Verily, nothing can so powerfully refine and elevate human motives, intensify the necessity of self-purification, open the inward eye to the most subtle and secret deficiencies of the heart, as the cleansing and transforming influence of religious culture. It protects us against the danger of self-delusion, idleness, error and spiritual conceit. It includes and promotes universal excellence, brings the soul into health and concord, enlarges it, unfolds it in due proportion, and exalts it to that high level of perfection which it is destined to attain. Religious training, moral culture, kindles the consciousness of the presence of God to the mind and brings home to us our responsibility for our judgments and actions. This consciousness of the Omnipresent, of His pure eye, compels us to guard ourselves jealously against every evil inducement from within, and every evil influence from without.

This is the sole aim and purpose of religion, which, as I have said before, is nothing more than a training, a culture, a schooling of our mental and moral attributes. The question now is what are the essential requirements of this education, how can we best and most easily prepare ourselves to receive this divine instruction and profit by it ?

The experience of all mankind, ever since man was born down to the present time, has testified that unaided human power is not enough to overcome evil. We feel this every day in our constant struggles with temptations, in our hourly strife with the passions and propensities of the flesh. Feeble in body, feebler in mind, feebler still in spirit, how can man, single-handed and alone, without some encouraging hope from above, withstand the allurements of the world, the power of evil, the influence of fame, of lust, of ambition and all the rest of their companions? Here he finds himself at sea, and intuitively looks for support and finds to his satisfaction that an ever-protecting hand is always with him : a never-failing guide is lighting the way in the vicissitudes of life, an all-wise adviser is at his back in times of toil and trouble. To have faith in him and in his goodness is the fundamental duty of a student of religion. Faith is the basis

of religious life—the gate through which man gets into the kingdom of Heaven. Knowledge is one thing, faith another. We may know and know all our life, and yet have no faith. Knowledge is not enough to lead us to God. All the Shástras, all the academic acquirements fail to make us realize Him. Man's knowledge is nothing, unless he can feel God in the innermost recesses of his heart ; unless he can depend on Him as a father, a mother, a friend and a guide — one in whom he lives and has his being. Without faith the heart is vacant, it is all emptiness, all shadow, all blank. I see my friends around me, I see the fowls of the air and the beasts of the wilderness. They live, it is true. I see all nature. It is real to me, for I have faith in my eyes. What is it then, that, in spite of knowledge, prevents me from realizing my God ; what is it then, that, notwithstanding the regular observance of rites and rituals, stands between me and my God ? Successful students of the school of theology call it want of faith. Faith is the eye in the spiritual world. It carries with man the presence of his deity wherever he goes ; in the temple, in the place of business, in the mercantile house, in the banking establishment, his God is with him. His presence he can never

fly from, His influence he can never disregard, His guidance he can never hesitate to depend on. He feels that his deity, his God, is not only his all in all, but that He is the supreme ruling power, the highest moral governor of the universe. This conception naturally and intuitively makes the body, the mind and the soul bow down in order to honor and pay homage to such a governor. Homage is a duty, the first duty we owe to God. We cannot do without it, we cannot dispense with it, unless we destroy the very relation in which we stand to God. Worship is natural. History bears it out. Wherever man has acknowledged God as the creator and ruler of the universe, there has invariably been found some kind of worship enjoined and followed as a regular ceremony, as a daily duty, no matter what shape and form it may have taken. Surely worship is the satisfaction of a craving soul. It is not a discipline, it is not a routine. It is a necessity without which no one can live, no one can grow in spiritual life, and without which all hope of spiritual progress is withered. The heart is eaten up with vanity and conceit, arrogance, and self-sufficiency, and needs the eye of faith and power of prayer to see and feel its own nothingness, its own inability to resist the awful attacks from

inside and outside, which no one can conquer unless and until he can pray humbly, ask earnestly and seek assistance personally from Him who is the source of all purity and strength. Keshav Chandra Sen truly said "without prayer life and death are identical."

Faith and prayer train man for the arduous duties of life, the due performance of which is said to be the fulfilment of the law. The moral law has no limit. It perpetually expands and broadens the acts and details of life. Right and wrong divide between themselves the entire sphere of existence. Nothing is indifferent, nothing is meaningless to the devotee. His body is a healthy and vigorous organism only when the principle of life acts generally through all its parts, expanding all in a proportionate degree, so that each part contributes to the strength and symmetry of the whole. If life is to reach its ideal, things that we know must be converted into things that we feel, and things that we feel must be transformed into practice. It is then and then alone that we may hope to live in God; we may hope to see to the right and to the left, to look before and behind and find ourselves encompassed by the living presence of God. He will then be with us in times of prosperity and in times

of adversity, in life and in death. The decline of the influence of this theology or that sect; the division, the disjunction, the disunion among the members of this or that religious body; the fall, the decline, the wreck of this or that man, need give us no uneasiness. The infallible Regulator of so many contending forces in the heavens and the earth has not so ill-constructed the human nature as to admit of a permanent discord among the apparently antagonistic religious proclivities of man. The tangible and intangible forces, the physical and spiritual agencies, the moral and material elements must fulfil and abide by the law of the Law Giver, like the sun and the moon, the day and the night, the light and the darkness. It is useless therefore to be hostile, unprofitable to be recluse, unwise to be schismatic, for God in His infinite knowledge and perfection has been regulating all antagonistic propensities to serve His noble purpose and will build His temple even upon the ruins of creeds and churches.





Practical Religion.

WEDNESDAY WEEKLY SERVICE.

THE 20TH APRIL 1898.

AT the last anniversary of the Brahmo Somáj I had the privilege to read an essay on the subject of "Religion — its Aim and Essentials." In that short discourse I attempted to shew that there was nothing extraordinary about religion, that it was innate with us just as any other inborn sentiment which we inherit constitutionally or any other inherent privilege which we claim as our birth-right : that the aim of theology was to give a training, a culture, a schooling to our mental and moral faculties, rouse them from dormant rudimentary state ; feed them, nurse them, develop them in due proportion and thus ultimately fit them

for such actions as are required of them : and that the essentials of religion were Faith, Prayer and Service. All these were then dealt with only partially, *i. e.*, subjectively, in a theoretical manner treating mainly of sentiments which are purely internal. It is my object to-night to take the other side of the question, *viz.*, the objective side which is rooted in our consciousness of God and branched abroad into practical action. Verily, our first duty is to understand the reality of life, that which is needed for the true enjoyment of life. In other words, we are required to know and do the practical, not merely to conjecture upon theoretical ideas. We are not, nor are we intended to be, dwellers in the clouds. But to effectually deal with this practical religion, we cannot altogether do away with the theoretical, for its foundation rests upon conceptions and reasons to which no tangible shape can be given. We must therefore go back to that period of life when rationality begins to dawn upon us, when the mental, moral and physical attributes begin to gather strength, when the potent forces we are endowed with begin to assume their normal activity. Indeed, it is in this elastic period of life when inquisitiveness reigns supreme, when "why" and "how" predominate the susceptibilities

of our nature, that we are adapted to enter into the arena of religion and take lessons of psychology. As soon as we become conscious of the impossibility of this universe taking its shape and form of itself, as soon as we feel the existence of the primitive cause at the back of every thing that we see and touch, as soon as the internal monitor takes its hold and declares unhesitatingly the immanence of a Higher Being throughout the creation, and perceives all round the hand of Him who is the origin, the life and the preserver of all, then we intuitively endeavour to form an idea of what that Being is, what He consists of. It does not, however, take us long to arrive at the conception that our God is boundless in power, unlimited in wisdom, perfect in justice, fathomless in love, and infinite in holiness. A further research reveals to us the incontrovertible fact that he is not only the perfect Cause, but also the perfect Providence : that the relation He bears with us and our surroundings is the relation of paternity and divinity : that from His very nature He cannot create a thing and make no provision for its subsistence : cannot give a desire and no field for its fulfilment, cannot generate a force, a power, a sentiment and no scope for its growth, no opportunity for its outlet, no

room for its unrestrained action. No, such an imperfect arrangement, such an incomplete order of things, such a defective plan cannot for a moment be justified even before a limited rational test, and cannot certainly be imputed to the perfect Cause and perfect Providence. Perfect as He is, the world and all things there must have been made, from a perfect motive and for a set purpose and therefore must have been provided with the proportionate means to gain the end for which they are designed. This requires no demonstration. The sun, the moon, the heavenly stars pursue their course with as much sternness and rigidity as the fishes and fowls and myriads of other living creatures on the surface of the globe. Human nature does not form an exception. It has been provided with sufficient means for the requisite development of man. All the faculties he is possessed of are the natural means for fulfilling the purposes of the Creator. He has ordered and balanced them so symmetrically that the cultured free-will of man, instead of being an obstruction, will only beget pleasure in the performance of duties which work out the result that God meant should be accomplished by human freedom. This is neither Fate nor Destiny, but Providence, which means no blind force,

no inevitable ordination, but rational and voluntary submission to the divine will.

Thus we start with the issues that man is endowed with powers, forces, faculties and sentiments by a due development of which he is capable of producing the result which is wanted of him by the divine will : that the part he has to play is not to create or originate what he has not, neither to destroy nor keep idle what he has, but to see and foster, develop and devote every feature of his mental and physical attributes to some useful purpose : that though the wide universe is full of good and useful elements, nothing nourishing comes to him but through his own toil. Knowledge requires diligence, wealth requires labour, health requires exercise, eminence requires perseverance. Yea, even the very existence of man depends upon industry for he "must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow." Verily, industry and labour is the chief element of his life. The powers that dwell in him, the energies that envelop him, the sentiments that encompass him, must be brought to their respective field of action, or else they lose their vitality, become rusty and useless, and fail to fulfil the object for which they were brought into existence. The

design of the Creator seems to be to present to man the seed of all that is good and beautiful and charge him to bring forth the wonders that are concealed in it by perseverance and assiduity. They are not revealed by any divine afflatus, but have to be evolved and cultured gradually by human exertion. The devotional feats of the olden Rishis, the sacrificing spirit of Father Damin, the mysterious achievements of the "Little Sisters," the miraculous triumphs of General Booth and his party, are all the result of hard and continued labour, labour of the hands and labour of the head. Indeed, man in this respect has been made the master of the situation. He can mould his faculties, use them rightly and enjoy life. He can fritter them away, cripple them by misapplication, render them impotent by indolence and make life a burden. Used, they will be a blessing to him, a source of happiness to those depending on him and a spring of enjoyment to those living around him: unused or uselessly employed, consumed in dreams and theories, they will be a cause of anxiety to the owner, of disappointment to those depending on him, and of corroding contagion to those living around him.

The poet has truly sung :—

“Man is his own star : and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate.
Nothing to him falls early or too late.
Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.”

But this is not all. The mere development of faculties, accumulation of strength, combination of forces, growth of sentiments, is not our goal. They are of no more value than the stored wealth of a miser. Of what good is the gold that lies buried in the mine? Of what avail is the wisdom that dies with its possessors? The fulfilment of the divine law, the execution of His holy will, does not consist so much in the knowledge and acquisition of mental or physical powers, though that is a necessity, as in pressing them into willing and cheerful service. The danger in the accumulated steam, confined in a given space, is not obviated until it is brought into useful service by the huge machinery of a locomotive engine. The destruction and ruin that an uncontrolled mass of water can bring about is not a mystery to those who have been to Shella and Bholagunj after the floods of September last, but carry it into a stream, control it, regulate

it, employ it to some useful purpose, and it will not only supply a cool drink to every one of us from house to house, but will also work like a sentient being at a massive water wheel or a ponderous hydraulic ram. Similarly, the destructive functions of the flashing lightning of the obnoxious gas, of the consuming fire, have been so subdued, adjusted, piped and boxed by human skill and application as to obey our command and add to our comfort like docile servants. The change has been wrought, not by any special divine inspiration, neither by the incarnation of the mighty power in some miraculous way, but by the application of powers and faculties which we have been providentially endowed with, by the use of unfailing industry and unceasing perseverance, indomitable energy and invincible determination, not preached but practised. Indeed, theorized ideas lead to bigotry, create sects, cause division and therefore bring destruction to the inner and outer man. But bring those very ideas into practice, apply them to the service of others, make them pass gently through the narrow paths of opposition and resistance, and they will not only be cleansed of their bigotry and bias but will also increase in purity and in power of combination. To retire from the

service of humanity, to sit quietly at some remote spot, to be impatient at the criticism of others, and give up work, is certainly an unworthy mode of living life, and may defeat the object in view, as it is in direct opposition to the design of the Author of our existence. Such a course may give some amount of satisfaction to the lethargic, some amount of imaginary ease to the drowsy mind, but certainly the spirit of religion will not approve it ; the law of the universe will not admit it. Such a man may be said to exist, but not to live. Of him Joseph Johnson truly said, that when his whinings cease, the world is no more the loser, but somewhat the gainer in the absence of a consumer and a non-producer. Such a man should have the law dealt out to him literally. "He that will not work, neither shall he eat,"—eat the spiritual food even.

Nature thus enjoins work and service on us, and religion is nothing more than obedience to the requirements of nature. Work we must, in order to enjoy life. Serve we must, in order to keep it agoing. There is no stoppage in the course of nature, no comma, no fullstop. No man can stand still either. The moment progress is not made, retrogression commences. If the blade of a knife is not kept sharp and bright, rust will

assert its claim. There is no evasion from it, no getting out of it, for it is the inevitable law of nature, the unmistakeable design of Providence. Indeed, work and use is the only unassailable fortress against the attacks of rust and dust. As in the material so in the spiritual world, it is the only weapon that will keep the enemies at bay. If we would get rid of the temptations that allure us in our daily life, if we would subdue the cravings of passions and the propensities of unholy desire which wage a war against our nobler sentiments, we must work and rise to a higher altitude, and bring ourselves by constant application under the sweet influence of virtue and truth, so that any one coming into contact with us may feel the warmth of piety and activity. Verily, we must serve, we must contribute to the enlightenment of others, and similarly receive light from them, if we are to feel that the aim and end of our existence are being answered, that we are at one with nature. It is divine providence. The elements, the forces, the attributes, nay even the properties of the lower order of things, have been so adjusted and balanced as I said before, that each one must contribute to the growth of the other. Thus the idea of exclusiveness, the feeling of aversion to go beyond a

certain limit, has no ground to stand upon. On the other hand, he who does not contribute his quota to the general welfare of his fellow people, acts the part of the drone, and little deserves the designation of a living member of the society to which he belongs.

Applying this test to our own selves, are there not many drones amongst us? Are we not more prone to live on the labours of others than to contribute our own to the general development even of our own small community? There are 40 to 45 members of the Shillong Brahmo Somaj, and yet difficulty is always experienced in finding a willing brother to minister to our spiritual wants. Some think, it is beyond their province to take the pulpit and pray to God, as if prayer is not binding on them. Others find themselves too incompetent to make an attempt, as if it is not necessary for them to do so. While there is another class of members who, however high their mental attainments, would keep in the back ground as if it is not a part of their duty to minister to the spiritual needs of their fellow worshippers. The result is that we are weak both morally and intellectually. There is little or no interchange of feelings, no unity of purpose, no real touch

with one another. We stand singly, as it were, like so many blades of grass, liable to be tossed by every gust of a sensitive emotion, to be washed away by the smallest torrent of a passionate inclination. Joint work combines and strengthens us, and adds sweetness to our undertaking. We have not been collected here for nothing; each of us is a force, a power, an instrument for the achievement of the object designed; and who can say that this collection of so many of us at one place has no divine aim to serve, no divine purpose to fulfil? Only we require to go through a series of permutation and combination. Let us then loyally accept the place which Providence has assigned to us and be up and doing. Let us dismiss for ever the corroding influence of idleness and apathy which is ever active to suggest means of evasion by the introduction of deceptive ideas of fitness and unfitness. It must be remembered that a task is only pleasant when we choose to do it and delight in it. Here lies the difference between freedom and bondage. If we understand our responsibility and take to work voluntarily, we shall no longer be slaves to what the Bible wisely calls "dead works." "Dead works" enchain us to custom and turn us

into lifeless machinery, which it is not the design of the Creator that we should be. A regular mechanical attendance at the place of worship does us no good, as the sweetness and pleasure of the thing is robbed by the slothful disposition of our unprepared mind. Mere initiation to a particular creed, declaration of certain principles, performance of domestic ceremonies in accordance with this or that rite, however important they may be in individual cases, help us no more in the fulfilment of the divine law than baptism with the water of the Jordan or ablution in the current of the Ganges. Indeed, the preparation for another state of existence, or to use a conventional term, the true "conversion," consists not in any mechanical work or show, but in the "holy and useful life." "Going about and doing good" was the precept of the Saint of Nazareth, and this is exactly what is seen in the lives of his predecessor Buddha and his successor Chaitanya. The maxim "as iron sharpens iron, so does the countenance of man his friend" is too true to be overlooked.

May God help us in understanding the true religion, and may His providential care lead us to the performance of what is required of us.



Raja Ram Mohon Roy Anniversary.

BRAHMO SOMAJ PRAYER HALL.

THE 27TH SEPTEMBER 1898.

IN obedience to the call from the chair I will say a few words about Raja Ram Mohon Roy as an active and energetic man. We have long heard of the good and benevolent deeds of the great Raja ; of his bold and courageous movements notwithstanding strong and vigorous opposition ; of his persistent and unwavering endeavours to discover the truth ; and, above all, of his honest and lucid expositions of the most essential duty of life, *viz.*, the worship of the one true God. In fact, it has been repeatedly

acknowledged both in the platform and in the press that Ram Mohon Roy was the most powerful personality modern India has produced ; that he was the happy welding of the philosophic intellect and deep devotion of the East with the sturdy self-reliance and indomitable energy of the West ; that in thought and action, in earnestness and perseverance, in courage and strength, he was equal to any man of the West, while in faith and piety, asceticism and pursuit of knowledge, he could fully hold his own with the foremost Rishi of the East. There is indeed no department of national reform which he did not take up, and of which he was not the forerunner. And the leading feature of his character, it will be noticed, was his accurate realization of the true philosophy of life, of its scope and end which has been lucidly described in the two short but comprehensive lines of the immortal Longfellow :

“Life is real, life is earnest,

And the grave is not its goal.”

Verily, true life is only compatible with effort and exertion, zeal and industry. It is literally striving to realize human aspiration, endeavouring to do what is thought best, encountering labours not superhuman but lifelong, continuous and

unceasing. Strictly speaking, the value of life is estimated in proportion to its usefulness. It is beside our purpose to-day to stop to discuss whether there is such a thing as exceptional genius, but I may say *en passant* that no great achievement has ever been the result of a sudden divine afflatus or of any special inspiration ; on the other hand, it is more the fruit of ceaseless human exertions than superhuman talent. Newton defined genius as nothing more than a capacity for patient labour. Indeed, nothing is impossible to earnest labour : difficulties of all kinds succumb to steady perseverance : obstacles, however great, give way to the enthusiastic mind : nature comes forward to the assistance of exertion : "Heaven helps those who help themselves." Verily, industry and diligence can create heaven in hell, and convert the arid desert into a lovely paradise. Genius or not, Ram Mohon Roy was undoubtedly a steady worker. The wide range of the invaluable services he rendered to this benighted land go to demonstrate this ascertion. The unflinching determination with which he carried on his work, the indefatigable perseverance with which he continued his labours, constitute his greatness, and indicate the mettle of which he was made. To whatever he gave his attention

he was always thorough, practical and hard-working. His energy embraced all domains of life. He believed in endeavour, exertion, ceaseless activity. He was a religious man, but inactivity was not a part of his religion, indolence was not an article of his faith, backwardness was not an item of his principle. His ideal was an ideal of usefulness, of actual service—not a mere feeling, a perception, a sentiment. Permeated as he was with the spirit of devotional religion, he was yet no visionary mystic, no idle contemplator. His periods of seclusion and retirement were but intervals in which he gathered strength for the active prosecution of the work to which his life and energies were devoted. Indeed, true spiritual life consists, not in contemplation and speculation, but in toil, in work, in labour which must be plodding, continuous, and untiring. It is truly said that actions bear the same relation to spiritual life as fruits bear to the living tree.

The life of every individual as well as of every nation is known to pass through four stages. The first is the stage of blind childish belief, the second that of doubt and investigation, the third that of settled enlightened faith, and the fourth that of strenuous action. The development of

these conditions was very prominent in the life of Raja Ram Mohon Roy. Labour is a *sine qua non* in all these stages. Without labour a child cannot thrive, without labour investigation is out of the question, without labour no sentiment can take hold on the mind, without labour no success can be achieved. Ram Mohon Roy knew this, and therefore he was never wanting in earnest exertion, he never failed to court labour in all the steps of his mental or material undertakings. Indeed, who travelled so much as he, who wrote so much as he, who argued so much as he, who studied so much as he, who struggled so much as he ?

Thus, with an energy that set at naught the formidable resistance which bigotry could command, with a perseverance which overcame the united exertions of his opponents, with a moral courage which triumphed over persecutions of the most violent character, with a benevolence which exceeded exclusiveness, with a religious sentiment which was firm but not fanatical, Ram Mohon Roy laboured day and night to liberate the Hindu mind from the iron bonds of illusion and lethargy, to leaven it with the elevating principles of labour and research. Such were the

characteristics of the Raja whose memory we have met to honour to-night. May his 'spirit come and work with us and elevate us to that high standard of life which he himself attained, and for which he lived, laboured and died.





Temperance—A Religious Movement.

WEDNESDAY WEEKLY SERVICE.

THE 18TH DECEMBER 1898

WE have recently heard an interesting speech on temperance in which the esteemed speaker* dwelt at some length on the pecuniary loss, the secular disadvantages that result from the existing system of excise administration in this country. He quoted facts and figures from official records, showing the relation which our Government has with this ignoble trade. He explained how, notwithstanding all opposition from

* Babu Bipin Chandra Pal.

religious and temperance societies, the consumption of liquor and ganja, opium and chandu, was increasing year after year, and unconsciously draining away a considerable portion of our scanty income. And, finally, he enjoined on us to refrain ourselves and discourage others from acquiring the vicious habit of taking intoxicating drugs. For some reason or other, however, he did not on this occasion treat the question in its moral or religious bearing. Verily, of all the concerns of human life, religion is pre-eminently the first look-out of a man. His supreme duty is to love, honor, obey and serve Him who has brought him into existence and endowed him with capacities for mental, moral and spiritual development. In this wonderful universe, we come across living beings whose beauty and elegance, cleverness and courage, strike us with admiration. Indeed, the fidelity of some animals, the self-denial of a few more, the sagacity of a third order and the various kinds of feelings displayed by several other classes, often lead us to suppose that there is a certain amount of rationality in them, but on careful investigation it will appear that these sentiments are confined to their relation with one another, that they never pass beyond a certain limit, that they have not got the slightest idea of the Creator

or the faintest feeling of our love or veneration for Him. Truly speaking man alone enjoys this privilege. He alone can realize the strong and living link of sympathy that binds him with his Heavenly Father. He alone can understand the will and the law of the Almighty. Verily, to know God, to love God, to worship God and to obey His command is man's nature. He is created "after the image of the Father." The love of human heart is the love of God. The righteousness of God is that very righteousness which constitutes the noblest life of man. The glory of human life consists in the sanctity of love and duty. A willing devotion to this duty is religion. In so far as we fail in this duty, we miss the true end of life; in so far as we are faithful to it, we are, in the strictest sense of the term, religious. To keep our status, therefore, as a human being, a rational being, a religious man, we must first know God; secondly, learn to love Him; thirdly, worship Him; and lastly, obey His Command. But how can we know God? We cannot see Him, we cannot hear Him, we cannot touch Him, we cannot fix Him in time or space. And yet we feel that we cannot do without Him, we cannot help seeking Him. We feel that He is here and there

and everywhere, that we live and move and have our being in Him. But knowledge and feeling are different things. What we feel we often do not know. Knowledge is the work of intellect and the clearer the intellect, the sounder is the knowledge. Therefore if we are to know God, our intellect must be very clear ; our reason, our power of discrimination must be unquestionably sharp. It must be free from all contamination, all shade, all unworthy and all misguiding influence. There is no other means of separating truth from falsehood than those of investigation and the free use of reason. It is indeed the light of the internal world ; without it a man is but a man in name, a mere frame, a mere embodiment of flesh and blood. To such a man the world is a meaningless mass of matter, life a gloomy existence, a mere visionary illusion. Verily, intellect is the mirror through which the author of the universe is reflected to the mind's eye and the cleaner the mirror, the brighter, the more distinct, is the reflection.

Our next duty is to love God. Feeling and fondness, affection and love, are properties of the mind. To love God, therefore, the mind must be free from all kinds of charming attachment, for He must be loved with all our heart. No division is

possible here. No partition is feasible. It must be whole and spontaneous. No external power, no outward force can generate affection. The intellect shows the way, enlightens the spiritual world, distinguishes the right from the wrong, the truth from the error, and the mind grasps it and grows upon it. Here too, the mind and the intellect have to play their parts fully and freely. Thus, with the eye of the intellect, the mind sees how loving is the nature of our creator, how protective is His power, how beneficial is His providence. It feels, it understands, it realizes that for all that delights us, for all that is good in us, for all that we are capable of enjoying here and hereafter, we are indebted to His kindness ; that He is not only the God of power and wisdom, but is also the God of love ; that His love is ever at work, ministering to our need, giving us life eternal and leading us on through defeat and disappointment, often without our knowledge and sometimes against our will.

Worship is another name for practical reverence and obedience to the concomitant result of unfailing devotion to our Deity. In this part of our life, wavering has no place and vacillation can find no shelter. The dealing is direct, and all other considerations must be insignificant in comparison with

His demand. The devotee perceives this and implores with a reverent and thankful heart :—

“ Art thou my Father ? Let me be
A meek obedient child to Thee
And try, in word and deed and thought,
To serve and please Thee as I ought.”

To worship God and obey His command, we must therefore have a strong will which must not submit to anything that may stand between us and our Lord, which must not be subordinate to any other call, must not be led away by the wild cravings of passion, or the softening supplications of this or that emotion.

On our religious side, therefore, we require—

- (1) A clean intellect,
- (2) An unbiassed mind, and
- (3) A strong and steadfast will.

Let us now see how intoxicating drugs affect these faculties.

It is common for all who write or speak on the evils of intoxication to give a vivid description of the bloated countenance, of the palsied limbs, of the trembling fingers of the intoxicated. They describe his waning prosperity, his desolate home; they sympathise with his heart-broken wife, neglected children, cheerless family members; and we

groan in spirit over the sad recital. There is no doubt that his outward appearance is pitiable, but it is but a faint reflection of the ruin within. The great evil of intoxication is inward and spiritual. It is an axiomatic truth that a drink or a smoke affects the head—the seat of reason—at once, and, as a matter of course, the indulger in it divests himself, for a time, of his rational or moral nature. He loses all control over himself, misses the reasoning link, fails to command his carnal propensities and, by repetition, brings on frenzy and prostrates more and more his mental and intellectual powers. Indeed, when the head is dizzy, when the reasoning power is stupified, we lose manhood. The mind then loses its sight, the will its strength. We try to perceive, to discern, to realize the good, but, forsooth, only to be dimmed, puzzled and disappointed. We decide, promise, resolve to amend, improve and advance, but, alas, only play false, break word, and disgrace ourselves under the degrading influence of drink or drug. Every peg or every *chillim* of ganja is a dose of poison for a rational being, and a man who delights in it wilfully lifts a suicidal arm against his higher life. The terrible outward calamities of such a person only partially bear witness to the inward ruin he works, and warn us all

what a fearful thing it is for man—God's rational offspring—to renounce his reason. Poverty is said to be the inseparable companion of drink, but this evil, great as it is, is yet light in comparison with the essential wreck which intemperance causes to the intellectual edifice. Surely, poverty is no dishonour to a poor man who carries with it the spirit, the energy, the reason, the virtues of a man. Honest, virtuous, noble-minded poverty is no real evil. The venerable Rishis of our country rather chose it as a condition of their life. Riches have always been shunned by them, intellectual growth was their first consideration. Verily, manhood lies in the development of our mental powers, and anything that retards this development is a degradation which only befits one who is a fit subject for an asylum for demented persons. Viewed in this light, intoxication is intolerable; nay, it is a positive and real evil which should receive no countenance from a sane man. On the other hand, it should be the duty of all religious bodies, and of every rational being, not only to keep this enemy at bay, but also to spare no pains to turn him out from wheresoever he may find himself a shelter.



The Season of Worship.
BRAHMO SOMAJ PRAYER HALL.
MAGHOTSOB :

THE 14TH JANUARY 1899.

I STAND to welcome all who are here in this house of God, and heartily invite them to participate in the celestial joy and heavenly blessings which this sixty-ninth Anniversary of the Brahmo Somaj promises to us all. Every season, every occasion makes its own imperious demand and presents its peculiar opportunity of a refreshing felicity or a bitter disappointment. Hops and honey-suckles cannot be gathered every month, nor can the cool morning breeze of May be expected on a dewy morn of December. Nature and its surrounding associations reveal their author in different ways at

different times, and the heart that can freely join therewith and can cautiously mark and ardently long to see His loving manifestations therein, is exalted. Verily, no earthly happiness can be compared with the pleasure of communion with the Deity, no gift to His grace. He is open to all. He is accessible to all. He is with all. He is around us all. He is perceptible and recognizable. He is infinitely merciful and loving. As light and air are not the exclusive property of any particular individual, of any chosen creed or caste, so is the divine revelation not the monopoly of any sect or denomination, far less is it confined to any land or clime. It is catholic. It is universal. It is the life and soul of the whole creation. Man has only been given the privilege of realizing it, enjoying it and be blest. The voluntary acceptance of this free blessing, the undisturbed realization of the one all-engrossing life, is his destiny. Endeavour in any way you like, adopt whatever process you please, follow whatever doctrine that may be congenial to your nature, the object remains the same, the aim continues to be identical, the end stands unchanged. The saints of all ages and lands bear testimony to this. In the apparent diversity of mode and form in devotional performances, there

is a law of unity, a progressive order in the rise and expansion of all the great systems of faith. The religious convictions, the spiritual experiences, the ultimate conclusions of Buddha and Jesus, Mahomed and Luther, Chaitanya and Nanak, tend to converge to a common centre. Unity of truth is visible in the variety of circumstances, the commonness of instinct is perceptible in the different stages of development. There is nothing discordant, nothing inconsistent in the philosophy of their teachings. On the contrary, harmony and order, unity and progress is what each and all aimed at, professed and preached. Indeed, there is little doubt that different religious systems have helped and influenced each other, and contributed greatly to the development of the Universal religion of which we can boast in this age of science, when we talk and speak, laugh and cry by electric power. Verily, in these days of culture and civilization, Theism, based on a comparative study of the different religions of the world, is the only religion which can claim a harmonious blending of all that is true, all that agrees with the best religious and moral instinct of human nature. Here all scriptures find acceptance, all records of experience in spiritual life produce and awaken a common and genuine

aspiration, and all sectarian problems find a soothing solution. Here the spirit of God is all in all both for worship and sanctity of character. Theism is not confined to any age or country, sect or denomination. It is, indeed the religion of humanity, the common property of mankind. It is acceptable to all ; it is enjoyable by all. For, God in his infinite love has without exception endowed the human soul with the requisite capacity to know and worship Him, nay, more ; He has planted His throne on the human heart. He dwells in man. But to say that God lives in man does not necessarily mean that man lives in God. Our feelings rise and fall, our intelligence presents an ever-changing panorama, our desires flit across in rapid succession, and bring in a variety of changes in our impulse and energy, thought and expression. And the once godly and elevated man is seen to grope in the pale and gloomy shade of undesirable associations. Indeed, often in the loftiest spiritualities of the devout, a cloud of egotism is perceived to gather round and unconsciously over-shadow the divine glow.

Very mysterious are the laws of nature, and we can discern them but vaguely. As in the physical so in the moral world, two apparently agonistic

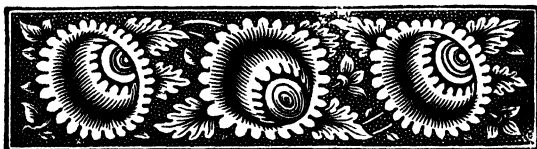
forces seem to be at work—the convergent and the divergent ; the former constantly drawing the object towards the centre, while the latter has the unbroken tendency to throw it off. The result, however, is good and instructive. Indeed, the sun and the moon, the stars, and the planets are kept in their regular and uniform course by the joint action of these two opposite forces. It is not otherwise in the sphere of man's moral and spiritual nature. If we were not composed of flesh and blood, and if our nature were not an admixture of human and divine elements, the question would have been different. But as we stand, man is both carnal and rational. His higher and lower nature are constantly at war. The inclination of the one is to confine his operations to the services of the flesh, while the tendency of the other is to draw him up from this quagmire of a lusty residence to that lofty abode of the blessed, which is the eternal home of the spirit. There are the passions and pre-possessions, presumption and vanity which relax our control over ourselves, and we are led away, so to speak, much against our will. There is unhappily such an inherent conservatism in human nature that when anything opposed to our pre-conceived notion or belief is presented to us, we recoil

from it and break out in passionate remonstrances. Hence, the disturbances that occasionally convulse the society, the unpalatable disagreements that create divisions and dissensions even amongst the most closely connected. And yet, we pass through moments in our life which are very different in their nature and subsequent effect. The solemnity of these brief moments overlaps all other experiences, and tends to convert all unpleasant thoughts and unrighteous actions into virtue, power and beauty. There are hours in life when the Unity, the Over-soul, is seen revealed in everything that passes through our consciousness, when the divergent forces are constrained to draw towards the centre, when the hostile proclivities lose all power of opposition. There are times when we are drowned in the bottomless depth of the spirit and clearly perceive that it is only the finite thing that suffers and wastes in the strife and struggle, the infinite remaining unbiased, untouched and unruffled. Verily, there are cycles and seasons when the divine manifestation is more distinctly realized, when His benign grace is more vividly perceived, when His universal love is more effectively felt, when His transcendental benediction touches the secret spring of the human soul,

and opens the flood-gates of his heart. The spirit's self-revelation then plays its part and the once depraved man glows again with the ray of the Lord whose fulness over-balances all his shortcomings. Nay more, even in the midst of error and darkness, waywardness, and wickedness, the divine light shines and the divine hand guides. Thus the whole situation is changed, and the man, however abominable, realizes the sweet presence of his Deity. How sweet is life at such times ! Those who are dear to us seem much dearer then. Nature then appears to wear her fairest robe. The soul then attains its fullest height and the promises of its best instincts seem to be realized. Blessed is he who feels such changes in him. Blessed is the season which brings them about. Truly, hath the poet sung :—

“One moment now may give us more
Than fifty years of reason ;
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.”





The Re-Opening Ceremony

OF

THE MAOKHAR BRAHMO SOMAJ PRAYER-HALL.

THE 6TH JUNE 1899,

AFTER the stirring, enchanting, eloquent speeches we have lately heard, it would be preposterous, nay ridiculous, on my part to make an attempt so soon to entertain you, Gentlemen, with anything like an attractive address. The voice of those deep and devotional men of erudition, I refer of course to the Revd. Pandit S.N. Shastri and the Revd. Mr. Fletcher Williams is still ringing in our ears and the sublime thoughts which they breathed into our inert souls are still keeping the finer sentiments in a state of

vibration. But happily my task is not to lecture on any given subject, nor to propound before you any theory or dogma peculiar to a sect or creed. Mine is a simple and plain duty, the duty of welcoming you here to-night and narrating before you briefly the present and past history of the Maakhar Brahmo Somaj, where the one true God, the God of all nations and castes, of all sects and denominations, of the whole humanity, is preached and worshipped. You are no doubt aware that this institution was founded in February 1886 by the united zeal of certain members of the Shillong Brahmo Somaj, some of whom are present here to-night, others unhappily are away. Time and circumstances have caused several changes in it. The good friends, whose eager and unwearied enthusiasm, first introduced the Brahmo Sangit in the Khasia language in its native tune, the energetic brethren whose lively interest and active co-operation infused new life and held out a hopeful prospect of awakening in our Khasia brethren that universal and natural sentiment of seeking God direct, which is indeed the primary condition of rational life, either left the district soon after their labours had taken root, or are scattered about like the disjointed parts of an once active machine, useless and therefore

valueless. The missionary gentleman sent out from the Sadharan Brahmo Somaj to revive our drooping spirits, and continue and expand the good work already begun, appeared like the rising sun to shine and glow for a time, and then only to set and re-appear in another locality, some miles away from here. And finally, to complete the frustration, as it were, the Earthquake of the 12th June 1897 totally destroyed the Somaj building which had been purchased by the generosity of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore. Indeed, the miserable and helpless condition to which we were thus reduced covered us with a deep shade of despair that scarcely left a passage for a single ray of hope to anticipate the pleasure which to-night offers us. The splendid house that stands before us now, the spacious hall that accommodates us this evening, the beautiful arrangement that gladdens our despondent heart was at one time beyond the contemplation of any sane man. There was neither money, nor material ; nor had any one of us the requisite time or energy to devote to the restoration of the lost trust. But God's will prevaieth. His plan is worked out through the despair and depression of human spirits, through the myths and mysticism of human knowledge, through the ebb and flow of

human activity. His loving goodness travels through the hills and vales of our miseries and afflictions, through the unsteadiness and oscillation of our irresolute designs, and leads every apparent obstacle towards the fulfilment of his glorious will. Verily, mysterious are His laws which work here, there and everywhere for the ultimate good of the universe. It is true that there is a good deal in this world to make us unhappy, to try our patience, to blast our most sanguine hope, but it is equally true that, as we advance in faith and knowledge, many things that appear antagonistic and discordant are plainly seen to be helpful and harmonious. Truly, the law of progress and harmony, power and wisdom, sympathy and love, has ever been at work binding man to man, family to family, nation to nation, in all climes and countries, and leading them on often without their knowledge and sometimes even against their will. Thus, here, while we were groping in the dark and not finding our way out of the difficulty, there rose the potent voice of Mr. A. M. Bose to appeal to the English people for pecuniary assistance. Their sympathetic heart—only a string of God's heart in humanity—was touched and it responded immediately. Here our respected townsman, Babu Jibon Roy, came for-

ward and took upon himself the reconstruction of the building which till then lay in utter ruins and was rotting in the sun and rain. Indeed he has spared neither pains nor purse in the execution of this undertaking, which has cost more than a thousand rupees. Of this, not less than Rs. 500 has been advanced by Babu Jibon Roy himself. Rupees two hundred was received from the funds raised by Mr. Bose in England and for the balance we are indebted to the Shillong Brahma Somaj and its Secretary. These debts must be paid and we appeal to your generosity for such aid as the circumstances of each may permit you to give.

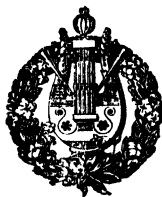
Finally, having got the house again, undoubtedly a much better house than we had before, it now remains for us to use it for the purpose for which it is intended, *viz.*, for the worship of the one true God. There was a time when man thought and believed that there were as many gods as there are elements in nature; that these had passions and propensities like ours; that they opposed one another and used their respective powers to assert their individual supremacy; that man in propitiating one was liable to provoke the jealousy or lose the favour of another and that it was therefore

thought expedient, nay, imperative to invoke the blessings of all. Happily, those days are fast dying out. With the advance of knowledge and progress of humanity, it is found that with all its diversity nature is but one and that everything in it, however discordant in appearance, points to unity of power, unity of purpose, unity of life. Again, if we look within we find the same thing. We find that the power, wisdom and life that surround us are united in one Being who can use power, exercise wisdom, and communicate life. We feel that He is revealed in nature, He is revealed in humanity, He is revealed in the essentials of everything that exists in this world. His light lighteth the sun, the moon and the stars; His power sustaineth the mental and material forces. Verily this one Being, call him God or by any other name you please, is the true Ruler of the whole universe. Him our whole moral nature intuitively seeks to adore; on Him our feeble heart spontaneously inclines to rest; in Him our internal hopes and aspirations expect to find fulfilment; Him we look forward to for deliverance from sins and iniquities.

Blessed is he who seeks Him be times and can depend upon Him in his trials and temptations;

Blessed is he who can renounce himself and his affairs to His merciful care and with a reverent and thankful heart, say :—

“Teach me God and King
In all things Thee to see ;
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.
All may of Thee partake ;
Nothing can be so mean
Which in Thy light and for Thy sake
Will not grow bright and clean.”





Physical Labour as a Basis of Religion.

WEDNESDAY WEEKLY SERVICE.

THE 11TH OCTOBER 1899

THE subject of my discourse to-night is "Physical labour as a basis of Religion." There is nothing in this world which has no foundation, no direct or indirect connection with another object independent of itself. On the other hand, it is as certain as anything in mathematics that whatever we see and touch, depends for its life and growth upon the support of something else. This is indispensable. It must have a footing, a leg, a basis to stand upon, a root from which to grow, a hinge on which to turn, a something, however small and insignificant in comparison with the complete whole, which forms its groundwork. A tiny little root which runs into the earth and is not often seen, supplies the living sap to the gigantic oak. But for the small unnoticeable hinge attached to one end, the massive

gate of a royal palace would be useless. The sub-structure of a house which is buried under the ground and which is perhaps the least attractive part of the most splendid building forms the foundation upon which the existence of the whole edifice depends. Indeed, what root is to the tree, hinge to the door, foundation to the house, physical labour is to the thinking faculty of a man. This may appear strange as instead of making religion stand upon faith and purity, I am rather going out of the way and connecting it with material things—an assertion which is manifestly opposed to popular notion. There is no doubt that faith, purity and love are important factors in the formation of a religious life, but labour prepares the ground for, and supplies the life-string, to it. If religion has a direct bearing on the intellectual faculties of man, if it has an inseparable binding with his reasoning powers, if it has an indispensable relation with his natural feelings, then there can be no denying that its growth and development will rest mainly on the healthy condition of his flesh and blood. Surely, the purer is the blood from plague and poison, the freer is his flesh from sickness and disease; the less subjected is his whole body to pang and pain, the more easily

can he concentrate his mind and consécrate his soul to the thought and worship of his God ; the more devoutly can he meditate on the love and goodness of his eternal Father, the more cheerfully can he attend to his daily duties and approved ceremonies. Verily, the relation between a man's physical power and mental attributes is so close and firm that a disease in the former necessarily produces a derangement in the latter. We do not know positively how the soul will continue its work after it is liberated from this bondage of flesh : our faith on this point is based on theory and reason ; but here, in this field of action, our religion does not consist merely in principles and dogmas but in the practical thought and deed. With a bad liver or a heated head, an aching heart or inflamed lungs, we cannot certainly sit down quietly and hold a deep and unbroken communion with our God. No. Every organ, every limb, every part of this mortal frame should, if possible, be alive, fit and ready to perform the duty for which it is created. Indeed, labour and exercise, culture and training seem to be the lot of man. If he is to grow mentally, morally or intellectually, he must first of all grow physically. The child grows bodily before

he can think and reason ; he uses his hands and feet before he knows why ; he greets and salutes before his feelings of reverence and respect are developed ; he laughs or rejoices, wails or moans before he can assign any reason for doing so. Indeed, there can be no two opinions that physical developments go ahead of intellectual fruition ; that spiritual edifices are built upon the strong foundation of healthy physic. In this, both the Eastern and Western savants agree. Jeremy Taylor asserts that physical labour is as much necessary for the development of the body as it is for the strengthening of the will and the mind ; and that it not only supplies vitality to the flesh but also controls the lower passions. The following Sanskrit verses will also bear me out :

“धर्मार्थ-काम-मोक्षाणां एकमेव हि साधनं ।

शरीरं रक्षणीयं तत् सर्वैः सर्वात्मना सदा ॥”

“शरीरमाद्यं खलु धर्मसाधनम् ।”

Now, the question may be what kind of labour is most suited for us ? It is difficult to lay down a hard and fast rule in this matter. What is wanted, is some kind of exercise which would make the blood flow readily through the veins and animate the muscles to play freely : some kind of labour which would sponge the excessive watery substance

out of the blood and relieve the joints from the attacks of gout ; some kind of exertion which would keep the liver and the stomach in working order ; some kind of work which would stop the blood from running into the head. Ride, if you have the means to do so ; play, if you can form a match, or walk about, if you have the time ; work at your own garden and derive the double benefit, if you have a taste for it ; but pray, never carry your thoughts there with you. Physical labour and mental exercise, though inseparably connected, are not to be pursued simultaneously, for, an already occupied brain detracts much from the product of labour. Rest and change of occupation are as much necessary for the brain as for the body. Over-exertion of the one stunts the growth of the other ; while, on the other hand, absolute inaction kills both. Verily, it is only when the body and the intellect receive their full quota of exercise and run in a perfectly healthy state, when every faculty of the mind, every function of the intellect, every limb, every muscle, every nerve of the body is strong, vigorous and in working order that the human life attains the highest standard imaginable. May God bless us that we may realize the importance of physical exercise, which is so much ignored and neglected in these days.



Raja Ram Mohon Roy Anniversary.

BRAHMO SOMAJ PRAYER HALL.

THE 27TH SEPTEMBER 1900.

I STAND before you this evening not with a view to deliver a speech or read an essay which may keep you engaged on this great occasion. Mine is an humble tribute to the memory of the great Raja, a sincere acknowledgment of personal obligation to the foremost reformer of the country of my birth, a simple and willing performance of an imperative duty which I feel I cannot keep myself away from. As in a gigantic machinery, the smallest screw, the thinnest pin, has its place, so in this great national movement, I must find a place, a part to play, no matter what it may be, or how insignificant it may appear to others. The significance does not lie in the importance or the magnitude of a work itself, but in its affinity with the spirit of the worker. The story of the squirrel at the great *Sethu Bund* is known to you all. Failing to be of any other service he set himself about in carrying what sand he could by his wet tail with a view to smooth

the high, metalled way which was being constructed by his stronger and abler co-labourers. He felt he must join in, and contribute what little he could, to the significant event of the time, or else he would be wanting in his duty. He had neither the time nor the inclination to think whether his services would be accepted or rejected with derision by those in charge, or whether he had the strength or capability to execute what he was undertaking to do. In fact, success or failure was not what he was looking for. A better motive, a purer object, pervaded his mind ; a stronger feeling, an indomitable force was at work ; a holy influence, a divine emotion impelled him to action regardless of all consequences. It was this godly sentiment that incited him to approach the mighty ocean, heedless of the sweeping surges that swallowed every moment several furlongs of its shore. Indeed, it is this internal impetus that overpowers all mental and material forces. But for this healthy and ever-watchful impulse, this meeting to-night would have been an impossibility ; my venture to rise before this learned assembly, a mere Utopean project, and my extremely defective account of that august personage, a subject for public ridicule. But Ram Mohon Roy has turned the scale to the other side.

He has shewn by his life and action that the still small voice of the silent monitor within is of far greater value than the outcry of a thousand others raised all around. Verily, of all the many-sided greatness for which the Raja was celebrated all over the world, his careful discernment of the promptings of his own mind and his loyal and faithful adherence to them stand pre-eminent. The dominating principle of his existence was a patient study of self. "Know thyself" was his motto; "Trust thyself" was his maxim. To him all other knowledge was only secondary, serving merely as fuel to his own internal flame. Truly speaking, the light is already within us; it only requires to be cautiously seen, to be tenderly fostered, to be constantly trimmed and to be unhesitatingly followed. Man, indeed, is a glorious creation—the beloved offspring of that Divine Being who is all light, all power, all knowledge, imperishable and everlasting. God in His infinite mercy has endowed man with faculties to which no limit can be set; has furnished him with a light which never extinguishes and invested him with nature which is a standing guard against all intruders. None is deprived of it; on the other hand, each has his own share. Yes, each has his own part; he bears no comparison with an-

other ; he suffers no contrast with the relative value or excellence of his comrade ; he dislikes being placed side by side with his brother-worker. Collocation lowers him, humiliates his spirit, overshadows his light, weakens his powers, bewilders his guide and leaves him in a wretched state of chaos and confusion. He is born to work for himself, he is destined to build his own abode. Given a place, a position, a society, a chain of events, man must make his own way ; he must gain the desired end by his own merits. Dependence won't help him, it is not congenial to his nature ; subservience cannot succeed, it is not an attribute of his mind ; subjection only creates difficulties, it is not in unison with his constitution. Imitation stunts the growth of his active energies, it is suicidal. Verily, the poet sang:—

“Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,

These three alone lead life to sovereign power.”

Ram Mohon Roy was truly a practical example of the precept instilled in these lines. He was doubtless a self-made man. He studied his moral nature most scrupulously, perceived his spiritual sublimity most correctly, felt and understood most vividly that the absolutely trustworthy was actually seated within his own heart and therefore with the

authority of an unflinching conviction he set greater value upon the gleam of light that flashed from within his own self than the lustre which emanated from other sources. Indeed, it is this belief in the inner self, this confidence in its low but distinct whispers, this absolute submission to its sacred counsel that defies all opposition, disregards all public opinion, disowns all connexions. Obstructions, however formidable, antagonism, however defiant, persecutions, however inhuman, melt down before the stronghold of conviction. Truly, faith in self, reliance on one's own conclusions, adherence to his own idea, is the only safe and true guide in this transient world which is full of conflicting opinions and discordant views. Conviction removes mountains, it steers clear through insurmountable difficulties. Physically, Lord Roberts is not equal to any two of his Lieutenants, but his devotion to his own conception, his belief in his own plan, his attachment to his own resolution makes an imperious demand which none can venture to disobey; while on the other hand, the whole garrison under his command follow the mandate readily even at the risk of total destruction; nay, his enemies find it necessary to make room for his advance. Such is the power of this inner man. He is absolute, he is

unbounded. It is this mental power that sustained Ram Mohon Roy amid the joint, vigorous and protracted attacks of all the prevailing faiths of the time. He did not succumb to their pressure or refrain from challenging his combatants. He met them in their own field and turned their own weapons against them. He studied their scriptures which served only to supply oil to his own light which he still held fast, unmoved, unaffected, unbiassed. Verily, nothing is so sacred to us as the integrity of our own mind ; no law so binding on us as the law of our own nature. Good and bad names change with time and circumstances. The only right is what is in keeping with our own constitution, the only wrong what is against it. Truly, virtues are natural, not imported ; nothing foreign can find place in us without destroying some inborn faculty fitted to our system. Manifestly, our duty is to know our ourselves, to discover our own virtues, to foster them, develop them, expand them, and ultimately employ them in the service of Him who is our Creator, Protector, Master, Keeper and Guide now and for ever.
